

Joyce

# McDonald

## 2006 Legislative Session Review



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### STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 25th DISTRICT

May 2006

Dear friends,

*The 2006 legislative session adjourned March 8, one day earlier than our scheduled 60 days. It was only the second time in the history of our state that we've adjourned early. (The first time was in 1986.)*

*Much was accomplished during the two months we were in Olympia. The Legislature approved tougher sentences against sex offenders, repeat drunk drivers, and users and manufacturers of methamphetamine. A bill I prime-sponsored to increase penalties against the neglect and abuse of dependent care persons also was approved and signed into law. We also repealed the day-use fee at state parks, provided additional help for students taking the WASL, approved home heating assistance for elderly and low-income citizens, and adopted several bills to help our veterans.*

*Unfortunately, the majority party also went on a spending spree in the supplemental operating budget, ignoring the voter-approved spending limit and raising expenditures by 17.7 percent over the previous biennium. They ignored legislation I prime-sponsored that would restore tax limits. And none of the revenue surplus was put away in a rainy day fund.*

*This newsletter provides a report of the accomplishments and disappointments in the 2006 legislative session.*

*I greatly appreciate the honor to serve and represent you in the House of Representatives. I take this responsibility seriously and value your thoughts, concerns and questions.*

Thank you!

Joyce

Rep. Joyce McDonald



Serving Edgewood, Fife, Midland, Milton, Puyallup, Summit and South Hill



# Joyce McDonald

25th DISTRICT

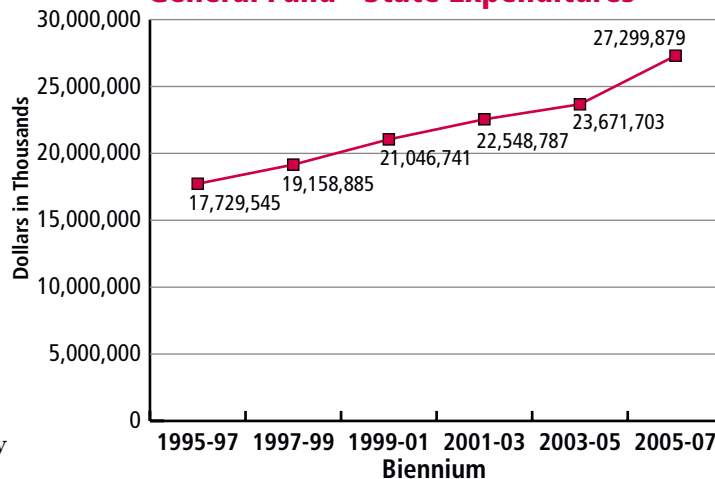
## Supplemental operating budget is anything but supplemental

One purpose for a 60-day session is to adjust the two-year operating budget adopted during the previous legislative session. A supplemental budget is supposed to: address unanticipated, unmanageable changes in program caseloads; correct a serious technical error in the original appropriation; deal with an emergency; and/or address an opportunity that will not be available in the next biennium.

Except for minor changes in school enrollments and department caseloads, there were no other pressing needs that required reopening the budget process this year. Yet that's what the majority party did when it discovered that the state would be taking in a surplus of \$1.6 billion.

I serve as a member of the House Appropriations Committee and was truly disappointed that I and my fellow House Republicans were shut out of supplemental operating budget negotiations by majority Democrats. Behind closed doors, they created a plan to spend \$1.3 billion of the state's \$1.6 billion revenue surplus. Their budget plan spends \$468 million on new, ongoing programs, and transfers \$825 million to other spending accounts. It leaves an end balance of less than \$216 million. The 17.7 percent boost in biennial budget spending is the largest spending increase in the history of the state. The budget plan adds 816 employees to the state payroll. Unfortunately, no money was placed into a protected rainy day fund.

General Fund - State Expenditures



## McDonald seeks to restore tax limits

I'm very concerned that the operating budget spends way too much and is unsustainable, setting up the state for future tax increases. Last year, the majority party suspended voter-approved Initiative 601, which contained spending limitations and required a two-thirds vote of the Legislature to raise taxes. Now, with only a majority vote required, it is simply too easy to raise people's taxes.

This year, I introduced two measures to make it harder to increase taxes. House Joint Resolution 4218 sought to require approval of three-fifths or 60 percent of both houses in the Legislature before taxes could be increased. House Bill 3007 proposed to implement a constitutional amendment placing the same restrictions on tax increases. Unfortunately, these bills did not receive a hearing. If a proposal is worthy enough to require raising taxes, it should have no problem gaining the support of 60 percent of the members of the House and Senate. That's what representative government is all about!

## Tougher sex offender laws protect children, vulnerable adults

For years, I have pushed for stronger laws against sex offenders. I've very pleased that the majority party came on board this year and admitted that action is needed to protect our children and vulnerable adults. Numerous bills were introduced to crack down on sex offenders, several of which I co-sponsored. The following measures passed the Legislature:



- **HB 3277** - Locks up some offenders for a minimum of 25 years. The measure includes broad exemptions for family members that leave open sentencing alternative loopholes. By contrast, I co-sponsored HB 2476, which included minimum sentences of 25 years to life for first-degree child molestation or rape for all convicted offenders, regardless of whether or not they knew the child.
- **HB 2407** - Allows use of electronic monitoring as a condition of community custody.
- **HB 2654** - Prohibits sex offenders from being certified as sex offender treatment providers.
- **SB 6172** - Designates possession of child pornography as a sex offense. Those convicted of possessing child porn would have to register as a sex offender.
- **SB 6319** - Increases the penalties for failure to register as a sex offender.
- **SB 6325** - Prohibits repeat sex offenders from living close to schools.

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## Home heating assistance provided

High energy costs are difficult for all of us, but especially for elderly and low-income citizens. This year, the Legislature approved \$7.6 million for energy assistance to help these families.

## Park day fee eliminated

After watching attendance decline at state parks by nearly 20 percent since a \$5 day-use parking fee was enacted three years ago, the Legislature repealed the charge this year. I did not approve of the increase three years ago, so I was very pleased to support its repeal. A state park is a great place for a family to spend the summer without spending a lot of money.

## Bill to protect dependent people signed into law

Many people in Washington are dependent on others for their care and basic needs. It's heartbreaking to hear of cases these vulnerable citizens have been denied the basic necessities of life, such as food, water, and a clean place to sleep. Caregivers who put the lives of dependent persons in danger need to be held accountable. That's why I introduced and the Legislature approved House Bill 1080, which increases penalties for first- and second-degree criminal mistreatment and abandonment. This new law will help bring justice to our most vulnerable citizens and ensure that the punishment fits the crime for those who would abuse or criminally neglect them.

## Broken promise to veterans is disappointing

As the wife of a veteran, I am joined by many who are disappointed with a promise broken by Senate Democrats on the last night of the legislative session.

Republicans wanted the Senate to vote on House Bill 3293, which would have required protesters at funerals to remain at a distance of 500 feet or be

charged with a misdemeanor under the state's disorderly conduct law. The measure was sparked by protests conducted by a hate group at the funerals of military veterans in Yakima, Kirkland and Renton. The bill had already passed the House unanimously. With Senate approval it could have gone straight to the governor to be signed into law.

In the final hours of the session, Senate Republicans obtained a signed agreement from Senate Democrat leaders. The agreement was that majority Democrats would pull up House Bill 3293 for a vote in exchange for allowing a pension bill the Democrats also wanted to be considered.

The pension bill was brought to a vote and passed. When it came time for the funeral bill, Senate Democrats reneged on the agreement and moved directly to proceedings to adjourn the 2006 session.

When you make a promise, you should keep it. Especially if it is a promise involving Washington veterans who have sacrificed for their country. House and Senate majority parties have now promised to make the bill one of the first they pass next session. I truly hope they keep that promise.



*The 2006 Daffodil Festival Royalty recently visited Rep. Joyce McDonald at the state Capitol. From left, Jasmine Arabia, Hollie Eads, Kaleigh Jo Murphy, Rep. McDonald, Shallae Eugley, Heather Soto, and Lauren Rine.*

## Other veterans bills

We did take several other steps to help our veterans, including:

- **HB 2471:** Creates a first-time home buyers down-payment assistance program for Washington veterans, members and former members of the Washington National Guard, and never-remarried spouses and dependents of deceased, eligible veterans.

- **HB 2754:** This measure allows military veterans to obtain a loan of up to \$500 through the state Department of Veterans Affairs.





## WASL options provided

Now that the passage of the 10th grade WASL (Washington Assessment of Student Learning) is required for graduation, many have become concerned as to whether students are up to this task. I believe we need to preserve standards that will ensure our children are prepared to compete in this high-tech world once they graduate from high school. Yet, we also need to provide alternatives that will meet the needs of our students. HB 2973 does this by providing a career and technical high school graduation option for students meeting state standards.

## Thank you for your input!

Many thanks to those of you who attended my town hall meeting in Puyallup in February. And also, I'd like to extend my thanks to all of you who took the time to call, write, e-mail or personally visit my office during session. Your input is very valuable to me and helps me to better serve you.

Please note that I work for you throughout the year, not only when the Legislature is in session. My Olympia office is open year round. Solving problems is what being a legislator is all about. If you need help working with a state agency or need answers on state regulations or laws, **please call my office at (360) 786-7948 or the toll-free Legislative Hotline at 1-800-562-6000. You may also drop me an e-mail at: mcdonald.joyce@leg.wa.gov.**

## Felony drunk driving bill a small step forward

In past years, I've sought to toughen drunk driving laws by making the third DUI a felony. Unfortunately, that legislation never moved forward. However, this year, we did make progress with House Bill 3317.



The measure would make the fifth DUI within 10 years a felony with about 22 months in prison for the repeat

offender. It's not as strong as I would like it to be. However, it is a positive first step to get drunks off the highways. The law takes effect July 1, 2007.

## Taking AIM against meth

More than 349 meth labs were discovered last year in Pierce County. That's the highest number of any county in the state. Meth impacts our families, our children, our schools and businesses, our neighborhoods and our communities. It is a cancer eating away at our state.

This year, we took a three-pronged approach against this drug through legislation we called AIM. AIM stands for Auto theft, Identity theft and Meth. Auto theft and ID theft are two secondary crimes often committed by meth users to support their drug habits. Both of these thefts are at an alarming increase, primarily because of our meth problem in Washington.

Although the legislation we proposed for stronger laws against auto theft and ID theft did not make it through the Legislature, some progress was made on the fight against meth. The Legislature approved an attorney general bill that requires tougher sentencing, enhances authority and support for local law enforcement to inspect and shut down meth labs, and provides funding for treatment for persons addicted to meth.



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